



***George Washington & Jefferson National Forests***  
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Release ## 11-019

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May 18, 2011

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **George Washington National Forest Management Plan Released for Comment**

Roanoke, VA-- The Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture released the Draft Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the George Washington National Forest (GWNF) for public review and comment. The Plan will guide forest management activities on the 1.1 million acre forest for the next 15 years. The Plan is the result of a collaborative effort between National Forest managers, partner agencies such as the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, conservation organizations, and interested members of the public. The draft documents are available online at [www.fs.fed.us/r8/gwj](http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/gwj) or by request. Written or electronic comments will be accepted for 90 days.

The forest faces many challenges relating to the development of surrounding lands and increasing demands for the multiple uses of the George Washington National Forest. The proposed plan lays the foundation to address the ecological and social needs of forest stakeholders, while continuing the legacy of cooperatively protecting water and restoring forests that began a century ago with the Weeks Act. Management direction in the proposed plan addresses needs to: supply clean water, restore and maintain ecosystems, ensure forests are resilient to the stresses from climate change and urbanization, provide financially and ecologically sustainable access to the Forest, offer a diversity of recreation opportunities including remote settings, address energy development opportunities, and utilize best available science.

The Forest Service is scheduling public workshops in June and July where GWNF staff can answer questions about the draft documents, stakeholders can interact with Forest staff and other stakeholders to seek ways to modify the draft Forest Plan, and written comments can be submitted. The Forest website will announce the dates, times and locations of these workshops.

The proposed revised forest plan would:

- Sustain streams and protect water quality benefiting drinking water, aquatic biodiversity and the Chesapeake Bay watershed.
- Restore diversity and habitats for species requiring grassy openings and open woodlands through the fire and timber programs and treatment of non-native invasive species. Currently mature and older aged forests are well represented; young forests and open woodland conditions are lacking.
- Reduce vulnerability to climate change and impacts from development of adjoining lands by maintaining and restoring resilient native ecosystems, restoring watershed health, reducing existing stresses like non-native species, and engaging in partnerships across landscapes and ownerships.

- Ensure that 80 percent of the most remote settings on the GWNF retain their remote character, prohibiting timber harvest and road construction with limited exceptions. One new area is recommended for a Wilderness Study Area designation and three other areas are recommended additions to existing Wilderness Areas, with all four areas totaling 20,000 acres.
- Identify a sustainable road system that anticipates the decommissioning of about 160 miles of road.
- Manage for sustainable recreation use of the GWNF.
- Make almost one million acres of the GWNF available for gas leasing with various levels of restrictions including a prohibition on horizontal drilling on all federal leases. The Plan allows consideration of wind energy development, but prohibits it on 450,000 acres of identified sensitive areas.

Written comments can be submitted to:  
George Washington National Forest  
Forest Plan Revision  
5162 Valleypointe Parkway  
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Comments can be emailed to: [comments-southern-georgewashington-jefferson@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-southern-georgewashington-jefferson@fs.fed.us)

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